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CHAPTER ONE

A GENERAL SURVEY

Geographical

The area traditionally known as West Africa can be described simply as the land lying between the Sahara Desert and the Gulf of Guinea. More specifically, it is bounded in the north by Rio de Oro, Algeria, Libya, and the Chad Republic; on the West by the Atlantic Ocean; on the south by the Gulf of Guinea and on the east by the Gabon Republic, Congo (Brazzaville) and the Central African Republic. Its greatest length (East to West) from Cape Verde to Mount Cameroon is 2,800km. It lies within longitudes 20° west and 15° east, and latitudes 17° north and 10° south of the Equator.

The surface of West Africa consists of a number of plateaux standing at different levels. The most important of these are the Futa Jallon Plateau from which rises the Yobe River flowing into Lake Chad as well as other rivers emptying themselves into the Niger and the Benue; and the Adamawa Plateau whose highest point is Mount Cameroun, and from which the Benue rises. Most of West Africa's rivers are not navigable for ocean-going vessels, the most navigable being the Gambia. The longest river is the Niger whose total length is 4,160km, rising near the Sierra Leone boundary, 240km. from the Atlantic and passing through Mali Republic and Burkina Faso to the Nigerian Coast, where it forms a Delta.

The general relief of West Africa can be divided into three large zones running from east to west:

(a) Low, monotonous plateaux with no prominent uplands to the north. This zone is occupied by the lower Senegal River, the Middle Niger and Lake Chad.

(b) South of this is a zone of uplands. This extends from the Futa Jallon Plateau in the west to the Jos Plateau in the east.

(c) The coastal plains which lie between the uplands and the Gulf of Guinea.

There are five climatic regions in West Africa:

(a) The Equatorial Climatic Region of the Cameroun and Southern